

ORGAN/TISSUE DONATION

What is 'Anatomical Donation'?

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What every physician should know about patients who are NOT candidates for transplant donation, but wish to donate their organs and tissues for medical and scientific research, and what potential tissue donors must understand about tissue donation who are NOT candidates for transplant donation.

While practicing orthopedics for more than 25 years, I was often asked by patients how to donate organs and tissues. For lack of a better option, I referred the majority of them to the hospital's PR office and later discovered that the majority of these patients did not further pursue the opportunity.

In the case of potential transplant donors, I was told that most were not suitable candidates to donate for transplant due to age and relevant history. The remaining patients found that the actual donation process was extremely prohibitive, and the paperwork confusing and complicated.

After being informed that they would be responsible for disposition of the remains once the organs were procured, they simply could not handle the complexity of the process. Thus, they decided against any further pursuit of becoming a donor. None of my patients were ever told they could donate their bodies for medical and scientific research that did NOT require the rigid pre-requisites for transplant donation.

Up to this point donation had presented itself as a flawed and incomplete option. The patient was unhappy because he/she could not donate for transplant due to their medical history; the overwhelming complexity of the transaction because of what happens

after organs and tissues are procured for transplant; and most patients did not understand the financial ramifications of becoming an organ and tissue donor, nor did they understand the individual responsibilities of the donor and the transplant organization.

And up to this point, no one had mentioned research donation as an option.

SouthWest Institute for Bio-Advancement (SWIBA) is a viable alternative to those families seeking to make a difference, but falling outside the criteria governing transplant donation.

SWIBA is a strong advocate for the ethical procurement and placement of donated tissues to those researchers conducting groundbreaking research in neurological disorders, biomechanics, spinal repair, and surgical device development. Donated organs and tissues are placed with recognized educational research institutions such as Harvard Brain Bank, the Mayo Clinic, Columbia University, and Johns Hopkins University.

While collection and distribution of donated tissues is our primary function, SWIBA is also a strong advocate for regulation in the research tissue industry. We reinforce our commitment by working with state and federal legislators and regulatory bodies in order to implement the highest ethical standards and best laboratory practices in our industry. In doing so, all of our medical researchers and academic institutions must qualify with a stringent SWIBA application process before a single tissue sample is sent. That same tissue is accounted for from the time it enters our facility until the ashes are returned to the donor families along with the medical research community and SWIBA's gratitude.

It is obvious that cures for Alzheimers, Parkinsons, cancer, diabetes, and pain due to arthritis and other diseases depend on the ability of scientists, physicians, and medical researchers to obtain human tissue for research. Donated organs and tissues used for these types of research, and the knowledge gained through research donation, can prolong all of our lives and the lives of our children.

Anatomical donation

Anatomical donation is almost always an option, while transplant donation is not. Almost anyone can donate for medical research and education. Age, disease, or state of health does not necessarily eliminate an individual from becoming a donor, but can affect which tissues may be used. The only absolute contraindications for research donation are HIV and hepatitis. The specific tissues that are placed and the amount of tissue used in research depend on the wishes of the donor or their next of kin.

SWIBA encourages pre-registration of donors in order to obtain the pertinent medical and social history of the donor in advance of the procedure, but we are able to work directly with the family at the time of death. Donation usually takes place within 24 hours of death. Many research activities require tissue procurement as soon as possible. In



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many cases, such as bone marrow-based stem cell and immunological research, SWIBA would like to procure tissues within four hours of death. SWIBA offers 24-hour assistance with donor and family questions and legal matters.

SWIBA is a foundation that prides itself on its integrity and professionalism. Organs and tissues are recovered by specially trained personnel supervised by myself and other individuals highly trained in organ and tissue procurement. The donor and family are treated with the utmost respect and dignity throughout the donation process. SWIBA adheres to the same HIPPA guidelines that are in place in your own hospital systems.

As an organization, SWIBA does not reimburse patients for donated tissue; it is against the law. But it does offer benefits for the donor and family to help with the emotional and financial stress of a death. For qualified donors, the donation process includes no-cost cremation, free transportation of the body from anywhere in the continental United States, free filing of a legally-required original death certificate, timely return of donors ashes for closure (usually within three weeks), and family assistance throughout the aftercare process. In certain cases centering on study of neurological disorders, a free autopsy report is included for the family to understand the disease process. In cases of Alzheimer's or unexplained dementia, this may help the family in its long-range planning for immediate family members suffering from early, undiagnosed symptoms.

Physicians should understand the referral process for their patients who may wish to donate organs and tissues for medical and scientific research. It is important for physicians and medical personnel involved in all phases of medical care to understand that without human tissue for research, medicine cannot progress to its ultimate goal of preserving and enhancing lives. Medical personnel at all levels of treatment—physicians, medical administrators, nurses, social workers—must be aware of the opportunity that exists to further medical research. Research advancements made and the knowledge obtained from the donation of these tissues may one day help a member of your family.

South West Institute for Bio-Advancement

It is critical to emphasize the importance of obtaining tissue as soon as possible after death. That is why we emphasize pre-registration. I have a special interest in marrow procurement and must harvest the marrow within four hours of death for researchers to fully use it for non-embryonic stem cell isolation.

Some physicians and healthcare workers are confused about the difference between a transplant donor and an "anatomical donor" with SWIBA. An individual can be in either or both categories.

Physicians and all healthcare providers should know that SWIBA works with the Donor Network of Arizona and other transplant organizations. If your patient desires to be a transplant donor, the patient should be aware that after the organs are removed, the disposition of the body is still the responsibility of the family. SWIBA has the capability to work with transplant organizations to insure proper recovery of research tissues. Our organization also has the capability to assist the family with the disposition of the remains and filing of the required legal documents.

All medical personnel must realize that less than six percent of people who wish to donate tissue or organs meet the requirements for transplant (eye, kidneys, heart, liver, etc). We feel that SWIBA performs a service that is essential for the advancement of medicine and for our local donor community.


We ask that you allow our literature to be placed into your offices so that your patients can be informed about the option of anatomical donation. We want all medical personnel, at all levels, to understand what SWIBA and anatomical donation are about.

We would be happy to provide in-services for your office, hospice, nursing home, or clinic, to educate your personnel about all they need to know about donating for scientific and medical research. Our in-service generally takes about 30 minutes, but that 30 minutes may one day save your life, or that of a family member. Indeed, it's a small price to pay for a few minutes of time.

What do you do when a patient wants information about SouthWest Institute for Bio-Advancement service, or you feel that a patient may wish to be contacted about becoming a research donor? Simply pick up the phone and call SWIBA (toll free) at 1800.723.3031, and one of our caring representatives will answer all of your and your patient's questions, and take care of the pre-registration process. You and your patients can also visit our website at SouthWest Institute for Bio-Advancement at www.swibadonor.org for more information.

I am a pre-registered donor, and I believe in this program with my heart and soul. When I finally leave this planet, I want my last gift to be a "bio-legacy," my final gift to mankind, so that my tissues and organs can be used for scientific and medical research instead of being buried or cremated without benefiting my fellow human beings.

I hope all of you will feel the same way after reading this article.



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